Webinar Replay: Transforming Character Strengths into Productive Results

Take five minutes and write down on a piece of paper:

1. How do you define character?
2. What are three-to-five-character qualities of the team or individual you coach

Ask another coach the same two questions and compare your answers.

Link to watching the webinar: Webinar Replay: Transforming Character Strengths into Productive Results - Balance is Better

What next?

1. Read here for Dr. Ralph Pim's summary overview of character
2. Complete the following reflective question exercises, by asking yourself:

   What did I notice in the webinar?

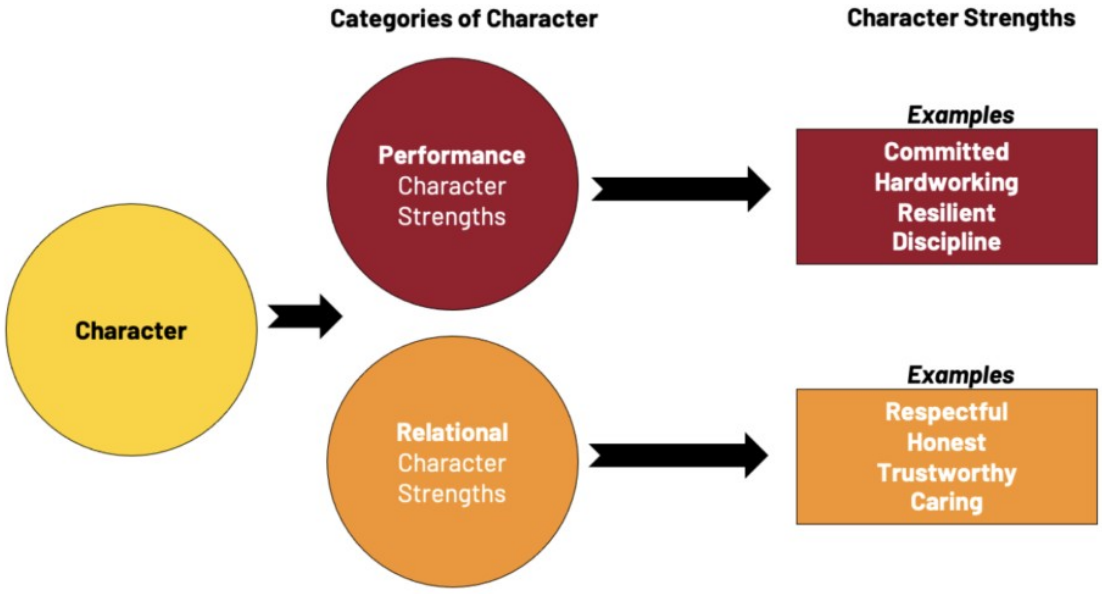
Write down the top 3-4 concepts in the webinar
Write down the key points that you agree with or that interest you
Write down any points that you disagree with or that interest you

3. *How can I apply my learning*?
   What concepts could you apply in your coaching?
   What support might you need to give it a go?
   Who could you speak to if you have further questions?
4. Find out more about the Coaching for Character Pilot

The importance of character strengths in sport is gaining increased attention. As coaches, we have unique opportunities to help individuals hone these strengths and develop as people, not just athletes. But what constitutes character? Can we really teach it? And how can we help athletes turn their strengths into positive outcomes?

In this article, Dr. Ralph Pim, an international character development and leadership expert, renowned for his work in developing leaders through sport, provides a clear definition of character, discusses the importance of identity, and explains how we can help individuals to develop character strengths in order to achieve productive results — both in sport, and in the world beyond.

What Is Character?



Dr. Pim, Ralph. Developing Leaders of Character WorldwideTM (2018)

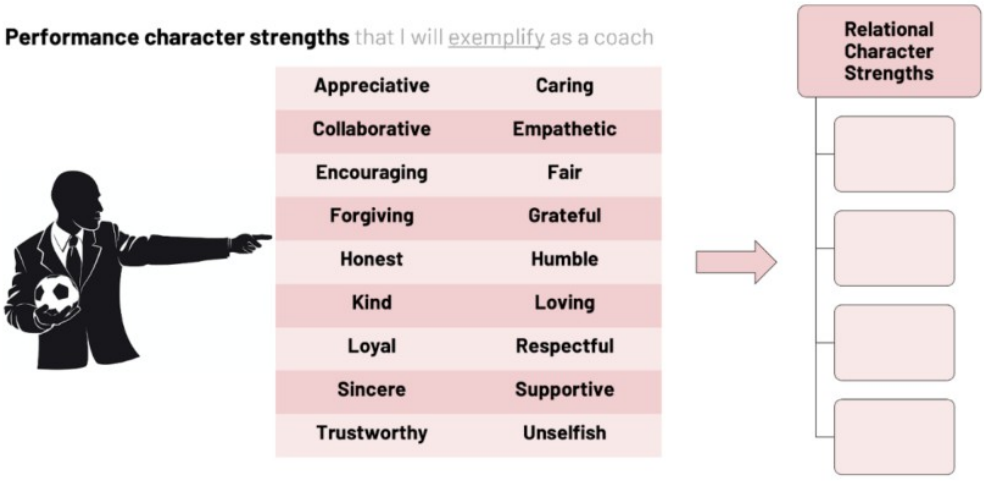
Before helping athletes to develop and harness character strengths, we must first clearly define what character is. “The word ‘character’ is too general,” explains Pim, “so we need a common, consistent definition. In the Coaching for Character programme, we define it as who you are as a person, as your values and beliefs in action. Experts in character development recognise that a person’s character consists of a multitude of character strengths — i.e. positive traits that lead to positive outcomes.”

Expanding on this approach, the Coaching for Character programme separates character strengths into two distinct categories: Performance Character Strengths and Relational Character Strengths. Performance Character Strengths promote mastery and success in a specific environment, and can include attributes such as resilience and discipline. Relational Character Strengths uphold ethical conduct and harmony, encompassing traits like respectfulness and honesty.

“The first step is to expand on that word ‘character’ and use terms that athletes can easily identify with,” says Pim. “It’s exciting,” he adds. “Evidence now shows that character strengths are critically important to social and emotional wellbeing, physical health, improved relationships, and achievement; coaches at the highest level are increasingly recognising the importance of character strengths; it’s character strengths that are the key to helping people unlock and fulfil their potential.”

Defining a Coaching Identity

Dr. Pim, Ralph. Developing Leaders of Character WorldwideTM (2018)



Dr. Pim, Ralph. Developing Leaders of Character WorldwideTM (2018)

As well as helping athletes to develop character strengths, those of us who are coaches, should consider our own qualities and how they shape our coaching identity. Do we exemplify the same behaviours we expect from our players? And are we consistent in our actions? This self-awareness and recognition of our responsibilities as role-models is crucial.

“The concept of an identity is very important,” says Pim. “When coaches determine their coaching identity, it drives their behaviours. I think all coaches could benefit from considering what they want their identity to be and how they’d like to be remembered by their players, and then recognising which Performance and Relational Character Strengths support that identity.”

Ultimately, we should strive to reflect and identify who we are, how we’d like to behave, and how we want to be perceived. This, in turn, will provide the basis for helping our athletes to form their own character strengths.

Helping Athletes to Develop Character Strengths

So how can we transform character strengths from simple words into visible behaviours that produce positive results? Pim outlines several helpful practices for coaches and educators:

“First, look to develop the whole person, not just the athlete. Focus on building physical, mental, social, and emotional skills. Sport is a perfect vehicle to help someone gain self-confidence, develop friendships, learn life skills, and have fun. It also provides a setting to teach about respecting others, working hard, and becoming more resilient.”

Next, Pim emphasises the importance of building relationships with athletes: “Discover why they’re playing the sport, what they want to accomplish, and their level of commitment to making that happen. Then, as you get answers, work with them. Define potential character strengths and find out what they look like to the individual. That’s your starting point.”

As athletes become more comfortable with the concept of identifying character strengths, we can then give them more ownership of the process. Upon establishing the traits an individual wants to exemplify, we can observe their actions and challenge them to consider whether they’re successfully demonstrating the behaviours to match them. As Pim explains, “if you can get athletes to think about that, suddenly these are behaviours, not just words; the individual knows what they feel like, what they look like, and can eventually take ownership of them and begin to self-regulate.”

Adapting to Your Environment

When coaching character strengths, it’s also essential to consider our environment. What age group are the athletes we’re working with? What is their level of ability, and what outcomes do they want to achieve? The answers to these questions should affect our approach; for example, while coaching resilience may not be appropriate for a group of under-8s, practising teamwork might be more suitable.

Most importantly, we need to tailor our language to the individuals we’re coaching. “Take the example of school teams,” says Pim. “Most schools have core values, so we can figure out how to connect those values with the qualities we want to coach.

“Coaches are some of the best teachers of character strengths because they have standards; they promote behaviours they think are acceptable and find ways to teach them through their activities. The best coaches ensure that players completely understand what those behaviours look and feel like.”

Consistently Coaching Character Strengths

Dr. Pim, Ralph. Developing Leaders of Character WorldwideTM (2018)

Finally, it's important to appreciate that coaching character strengths should not be a separate component of practice that impinges upon otherwise active and engaging coaching sessions, but that it should be interwoven throughout the coaching process. In fact, the most effective coaches will design activities that are centred upon teaching these key behaviours.

"Character development is not an add-on," concludes Pim. "It isn't something that takes five minutes at the end of practice. The process takes time, and we have to be patient. It starts with who we are as coaches and role models; then, as everything else comes together, the character strengths we discuss and exhibit are transformed from words into observable behaviours; then they become habits. And great habits will produce positive, productive results."